



Food Hygiene Inspection Guide

A practical checklist to help you prepare for Environmental Health Officer (EHO) inspections in the UK.



Environmental Health Officers (EHOs) conduct food hygiene inspections to ensure food businesses operate safely and legally. While inspections can feel daunting, good preparation and robust daily practices make a significant difference.

What this guide will help you do



- Understand what EHOs look for (and why).
- Spot common issues before an inspection.
- Use simple daily controls that stand up to scrutiny.
- Know what good looks like for records, cleaning and staff practices.

What happens during an inspection

An EHO may observe food handling, speak to staff, review records and check the condition of your premises. Inspections are risk-based and focus on whether controls are understood and applied in practice not just written down.



Inspector tip: Records should reflect real practice. Perfect numbers every day can look unrealistic.

Core Areas of Focus for Environmental Health Officers (EHOs)

Food Handling & Cross-Contamination

- Raw and ready-to-eat foods are stored separately.
- Allergen controls are clearly established.
- Measures are implemented to prevent cross-contamination.
- Safe practices for thawing, cooling, and reheating are followed.

Temperature Control

- Refrigerators and freezers operate at safe temperatures and are monitored regularly.
- Hot holding is managed effectively where necessary.
- Hygiene practices for probe use are maintained, and checks are routinely conducted.

Cleaning & Disinfection

- Cleaning schedules are established and adhered to.
- Appropriate chemicals and contact times are utilized.

- No accumulation of grease or debris is present in hard-to-reach areas.

Staff Hygiene & Training

- Handwashing facilities are accessible and fully stocked.
- Staff members are trained on when and how to wash their hands, as well as on contamination prevention.
- The illness reporting process is clearly understood and consistently followed.

Food Safety Management (HACCP)

- Controls are tailored to your operation and kept up to date.
- Checks are documented, and corrective actions are implemented as necessary.
- Managers can confidently articulate your key controls.

Premises Condition & Pest Control

- The structure is designed to facilitate effective cleaning and maintenance.
- Pest-proofing measures and monitoring systems are in place, with effective waste management.
- Storage areas are clean, organized, and safeguarded from contamination.

Inspector Top Tips

Environmental Health Officers (EHOs) look beyond mere paperwork. Their primary focus is to ensure that food safety controls are understood, consistently applied, and effectively managed on a daily basis.

Food hygiene inspections can feel daunting, but they are simply a check of how your business operates day to day. Inspectors are looking for sensible, consistent practices rather than perfection. Staying calm, answering honestly, and showing what you do in practice helps the inspection run smoothly. A relaxed, organised approach often leads to a more positive and constructive outcome.

- **Consistency is more important than perfection.**

Inspectors do not expect everything to be flawless; instead, they anticipate that issues will be recognized and managed. Documenting problems and the actions taken is often viewed more favourably than unrealistic “perfect” records.

- **Management oversight is crucial.**

EHOs quickly determine if food safety is being actively managed. Managers should be prepared to explain key risks, the methods of control, and the procedures in place if checks fail.

- **Procedures should reflect reality.**

Common inspection issues arise from outdated or generic procedures. Controls must align with your current menu, equipment, staffing levels, and operating hours.

- **Back-of-house standards are paramount.**

Inspectors tend to spend more time in storage areas, preparation rooms, refrigerators, freezers, and behind equipment than in customer-facing areas. Poor standards in these locations often lead to lower scores.

- **Staff knowledge is a crucial indicator.**

While staff don't need intricate technical details, they should understand when to wash their

hands, how to avoid cross-contamination, and the appropriate actions to take if food safety is compromised.

- **Allergen controls are under close scrutiny.**

Staff should never make guesses. If they are unsure of an answer, they should know where to find the correct information.

- **Records must accurately reflect actual practices.**

If monitoring records do not align with what occurs on-site, inspectors will question their reliability.

- **Presentation and attitude are important.**

Inspectors respond positively to honesty, cooperation, and a readiness to tackle issues.

Defensive behaviour can often be detrimental.



Remember: Most inspections do not fail due to a single major issue; they typically fail because multiple small issues are not being managed consistently.

A simple pre-inspection checklist

Use this the week before an inspection and again on the day.

Daily controls

- ☐ Fridge/freezer temperatures checked and recorded (and actions noted if out of range).
- ☐ Handwash stations stocked with hot water, soap and hygienic drying.
- ☐ Cleaning completed as scheduled (including high-touch areas).
- ☐ Food stored covered, labelled and within date; stock rotated (FIFO).
- ☐ Allergen information is current and staff know where to find it.

This week

- ☐ Deep-clean problem areas (under equipment, behind fridges, extractor/filters).
- ☐ Check probe hygiene and that staff know safe cooking/reheating expectations.
- ☐ Review your food safety management system: does it reflect current menus/processes?
- ☐ Spot-check records: do they match what is actually happening on site?
- ☐ Check waste storage and pest proofing (doors, gaps, bins, lids).

On the day

- ☐ Assign a point of contact to host the inspection.
- ☐ Ensure key documents are easy to access (paper or digital).
- ☐ Brief staff: answer honestly, show what you do in practice.
- ☐ Walk the site for visible issues (spillages, clutter, dirty areas).

Common reasons ratings drop

- Cleaning standards not maintained consistently (especially back-of-house).
- Records incomplete, unrealistic, or not acted on when checks fail.
- Staff unsure about key controls (handwashing, cross-contamination, allergens).
- Poor temperature control or weak hot holding/cooling practices.
- Premises condition issues that prevent effective cleaning.

Need support before an inspection?

Safer Food Scores supports food businesses across the UK with practical audits and straightforward advice. If you want confidence before an inspection, we can help you identify priority risks, tighten controls and improve consistency.



Book a free consultation or speak to an expert auditor.

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